

# Waste in Review

Integrating all the waste management methods described in this resource has helped a growing number of communities and industries divert or reduce significant quantities of garbage from the waste stream. Successful integrated programs not only make waste management more cost-effective, but they create jobs and may even provide an economic boost to communities. Because no one method can manage all the nation's garbage, EPA recommends a waste management hierarchy that ranks the various strategies in order of priority.

## EPA's Solid Waste Management Hierarchy

- Source Reduction—preventing waste is the best way to manage it!
- Recycling and Composting—converting waste into new and valuable products prevents pollution (including harmful greenhouse gases), saves natural resources, and conserves valuable landfill space.
- Landfills and Combustion—land disposal and combustion in properly managed facilities and in compliance with environmental

regulations are options for the remaining waste. Energy can be generated from each of these approaches.

## Waste Generation

Waste is generated at all points in a product's life cycle—while harvesting natural resources, during design and production, and during and after use in homes, offices, and schools.

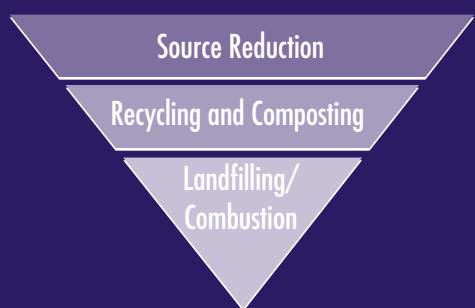
Hazardous wastes, which are substances that are toxic, ignitable, corrosive, or reactive, are

most often generated during extraction or production of a product, but can also come from households in the form of leftover prod-



ucts such as bug sprays, turpentine, motor oil, and laundry bleach. Municipal solid waste, such as old newspapers, yard clippings, empty bottles, and even whole appliances, is generated by people's everyday use of products, packaging, and materials. In the United States, each person generates nearly 4.5 pounds of solid waste per day. This figure could be reduced by placing more emphasis on source reduction.

## Solid Waste Hierarchy



## Helping Communities' Quest for Less

Regardless of a community's size or municipal solid waste service, progress toward preferred waste management approaches can only work if individuals understand and practice the 3 R's—reducing, reusing, and recycling the solid waste they generate each day. Every member of the community can do their part by identifying

ways to prevent and recycle waste and to safely dispose of household hazardous waste. It is also important for individuals and companies to “buy recycled.” After all, if no one buys recycled-content products, there’s no way to close the recycling loop.



## Future Goals

During the 1990s, recycling in the United States increased from 16 to 28 percent. EPA’s goals for the future are to recycle 35 percent of the municipal solid waste generated by 2005; to reduce waste generation to 4.3 pounds per person per day; to empower state, local, and tribal governments to better manage solid waste; to provide leadership in source reduction and recycling; to build stronger public and private partnerships; and to ensure the environmental soundness of source reduction, recycling, combustion, and landfill disposal. The concepts learned from the activities in this resource will help lead the nation to the path of a sustainable and waste-free future.

### Additional Information Resources:

Visit the following Web site for more information on all the topics discussed in this resource:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Solid Waste: <[www.epa.gov/osw](http://www.epa.gov/osw)>